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Issue of Secrecy: Books on the CIA

By Marquis Childs

IN THIS DAY of America's sophistication the impression is strong that what the public actually knows about the direction and control of foreign policy is like the peak of the iceberg. In the mysterious waters nine-tenths of what goes on—in Cuba, Laos, Viet-Nam—is hidden.

A flap at high government levels over a book to be published late next month throws this into sharp focus. The book is "The Invisible Government" by David Wise and Thomas B. Ross. It details the operations of the Central Intelligence Agency, the even more secret National Security Agency and a top-secret "special group" coordinating all this activity.

The authors estimate that the hidden part of the iceberg, including code-breaking and electronic operations, costs $4 billion annually and employs up to 200,000 persons; the budget for the Department of State this year is $385,000,000.

High Government officials go so far as to say that if the publisher were willing, it would be to the advantage of the Government to buy up the 2000 advance copies already in print on condition the book would be revised. This is based on charges that are made privately but that are not likely to be uttered in public because of the nature of the conflict over secrecy versus the rights of a free press.

THESE CHARGES include that the book contains 112 breaches of security, some of them serious; that of 49 CIA agents named 26 or 27 have never been named publicly before, with the probability their usefulness will be ended; that four CIA operations, supposedly history but in fact still active, are described in detail; that Government participation in theoretically private operations, such as Radio Free Europe, is spread on the record.

"This is the kind of manuscript," one high official said bitterly, "that if it were taken to the Soviet Embassy the authors could be put in jail for life. But submitted for publication here it has come out and is available to every foreign office and every intelligence department in every capital of the world."

Bennett Cerf of Random House, the publisher, says no one has made these allegations to him. He says they are nonsense inasmuch as all the material in the book has been published in one form or another before. It would be contrary to the public interest, in Cerf's view, to suppress the book.

The authors devoted considerable space to Cuba, both the Bay of Pigs and the missile crisis of October, 1962. They are thoroughly familiar with the operation of the U-2 spy planes since their earlier book, "The U-2 Affair," gives hitherto undisclosed details, details of the spy flights over the Soviet Union that ended with the shooting down of a U-2 near Sverdlovsk.

CUBA is currently in the news, with reports that exiles in the Revolutionary Junta are moving on the island. They are led by Manuel Ray, who pledges that he will return by May 20, the anniversary of Cuban independence, to initiate a campaign of sabotage and subversion. Another book just published, "The Bay of Pigs" by Haynes Johnson, has angered the CIA. It charges that CIA agents had told the Cuban leaders of that tragic misadventure to go ahead even if a last-minute cancellation came from President Kennedy. This has been denied.

The State Department has repeatedly denied any involvement with exile attacks on Cuba. But the credibility of these statements is in question in view of what has gone before, with emphatic denials later proved to be false.

While it may be a necessity in a divided and dangerous world, the damaging effect on a free society of the dirty business of spying cannot be denied. With all its brutalization and total amorality spun out in fantasy by Ian Fleming and others it seems to exert a fascination.

One consequence of the mania for secrecy—it is hardly less than that—is a growing attitude that the public shouldn't expect to know what is really happening. Visitors to Viet-Nam after the coup overthrew the Diems, found American colonels and lower-rank generals were presumably putting the blame on David Halberstam of the *New York Times* for writing about the weaknesses and lack of support for the Diem Government. Halberstam got a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting.

Where is the dividing line between secrecy and the right to know? "The Invisible Government" raises that question and suppression of the book is hardly an answer.